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News Room

Speeches

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Asia Forum for Human Rights Development (FORUM ASIA) - NGO Meeting in Parallel to the APF13 Conference

Speaking notes for

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and

Chief Commissioner
of the Canadian Human Rights Commission

Asia Forum for Human Rights Development (FORUM ASIA)
NGO Meeting in Parallel to the APF13 Conference

Monday, July 28, 2008
4:45 - 6:00 p.m.
Penang Room 1 and 2, Level 3
Hotel Imperial
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

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Good afternoon.

I am so pleased to be with you again this year and I have been looking forward to our dialogue.

Coming together to share ideas and develop synergies is so important.

I thank the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development the International Service for Human Rights, and the International Women's Rights Action Watch - Asia Pacific, for again inviting me to participate in your meetings

Last year, as you know, I had just assumed my two new positions - and my meeting with you was my first international meeting outside of Geneva.

Today, I will provide you with an update on the ICC activities over the past year, and some insights into our future direction.

This will lay the groundwork for your questions.

I am very eager to hear from you, to learn what is on your minds, and to receive your suggestions about how the ICC, its members and civil society can collaborate in practical, achievable ways.

Background on the ICC

I will begin by providing you with a "refresher" about the International Coordinating Committee, who we are and what we do.

Our organization was created about 15 years ago.

It is divided into four regional groupings: the Asia Pacific region, the Americas, Europe and Africa.

The purpose of the ICC is to promote and strengthen National Human Rights Institutions.

We do this through conferences, training, working groups and assistance at the national level.

As you know, a core activity for us is the accreditation of National Institutions under "The Paris Principles."

The UN General Assembly adopted these guiding rules to provide direction on the mandate, composition and functioning of independent national human rights institutions.

There are now 62 NHRIs holding "A" Status within the ICC, with the number growing yearly.

Accredited NHRIs are independent bodies. As such, they have a legislated mandate to monitor and address, with their governments, any gaps in the domestic application of human rights protection.

Update on ICC activities

When I was elected as Chair of the ICC in April 2007, I made three commitments for my three-year tenure.

1. Strengthen National Human Rights Institutions through a more rigorous, independent and transparent accreditation process;
2. Achieve an effective role for the ICC, its regional coordinating bodies and national institutions within the Human Rights Council Framework; and
3. Seek opportunities to foster and strengthen collaboration.

I am proud to report today significant achievements with each of these commitments.

Commitment # 1: Accreditation

We have strengthened our already highly respected accreditation process:

- We completed our two-year revision of the ICC Accreditation Sub- Committee rules.

A Decision Paper recommending changes to the rules was adopted at the 20th session of the ICC. The meeting was held this past April, in Geneva, where 46 of the (then) 60 'A' status National Institutions were present.

Final approval will be sought at our international conference this October in Nairobi.

- Three sets of guiding "General Observations" have been adopted. We also voted to develop a compendium, plus principles of interpretation for the General Observations to ensure that flexibility in interpretation is maintained.
- Last year, you raised with me a concern – how civil society can be formally woven into the ICC accreditation procedure. We have clarified that written submissions from civil society do form part of the written record in accreditations.

Commitment # 2: Effective role within the HRC framework

ICC Accreditation has taken on even greater significance since the creation of the United Nations Human Rights Council.

Over the last year, the ICC and NHRIs have engagedsignificantly increased our engagement with the international human rights systems in ways that reach beyond those imagined by the founding fathers of the Paris Principles.

Accredited NHRIs can now address every item on the agenda of the Human Rights Council.

Some of you may know Ms. Katharina Rose, the ICC representative in Geneva.

Ms. Rose has worked tirelessly to increase our recognition at the Human Rights Council and to establish constructive working relations with NGOs.

National Institutions can now actively engage in the Council's related mechanisms, such as the Universal Periodic Review process, Special Procedures, Treaty Bodies and complaint processes.

This is especially important for National Human Rights Institutions.

It reinforces their capacity to bring concerns before the international communityconcerns on their country's human rights situation.

It also enables them to constructively engage their government in addressing these issues.

Governance

Major strides have also been made with regard to our governance.

We have made substantial changes that will move the ICC to the next level of maturity, as is required if we are going to live up to the expectations we have raised in the international community.

We agreed to:

- define a modern governance model;
- incorporate under the Swiss jurisdiction;
- pay annual membership dues that can support a permanent office in Geneva;
- adopt a new mission statement: "The ICC is a strong, credible, and influential international human rights actor, in the promotion and strengthening of national human rights institutions and provides leadership in the promotion and protection of human rights"; and
- rearticulate our functions. Of note is our clear articulation that part of our role is to coordinate international collaboration with civil society.

Commitment# 3. Culture of cooperation.

We continue to build the culture of cooperation amongst our national members.and collaboration.

Amazingly, while we only began the governance initiative last summer, all of the decisions that I have just mentioned were taken unanimously just nine months later at the ICC 20th session.

I credit this accomplishment to the fact that this year, we developed a new model of leadership within the ICC that more actively engages the regional structure.

For example, in the APF region the Chair of the APF the Honourable John Von Doussa led the dialogues within this region leading up to the votes at the ICC 20th.

This was accomplished because of the active participation and support of our He was strongly supported of by the other voting members, including ICC Deputy Chairperson, Professor Ahn from the National Human Rights Commission of Korea, and our four regional Chairs, including the Honorable John Von DoussaRosslyn Noonan of New Zealand, and Justice Rajendra Babu of India – and of from the Australian Commission.course also by the APF secretariat led by Kieren Fitzpatrick and Pip Dargan.

Creating a culture of cooperation also means establishing greater partnerships with NGOs and civil society at large.

Your supportThis will become even more important as we move ahead to address new challenges and seek opportunities to increase our impact on human rights.

How can ICC and civil society enhance collaboration?

A question that I have for you again this year is: what more can be done by the ICC, and how can we collaborate with your organizations to reach our mutual objectives?

A few that come to mind are:

1. Universal Periodic Review
2. Thematic collaboration
3. Strengthening National Institutions

1. Universal Periodic Review

The stage is set for one of the most immediate and significant areas of cooperation between National Institutions and NGOs.

The new context of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), Treaty Bodies and Special Procedures lend themselves very well to renewed and greater cooperation – to everyone's benefit.

National Institutions and the ICC are committed to contributing substantively to all aspects of the UPR process.

Last April, in Geneva, the ICC, along with *Rights and Democracy* and *La Francophonie*, organized a workshop focusing on the role of National Institutions and how they can actively participate at each phase of the periodic review process.

To better understand the ICC role in this new mechanism, every regional group will be holding a follow-up workshop, including Forum Asia.

The APF is holding its event today, on the margins of the APF13.

The process is still in its infancy. We are constantly learning how we can better engage in the Universal Periodic Review.

With time, more and more institutions are undergoing this exercise and finding innovative ways for NHRIs and organizations to work together.

Here are some opportunities for UPR collaboration:

- At the documentation phase of the process, National Institutions can work with NGOs to develop national reports.

  The resulting documents can highlight best practices and explain challenges faced by the States in the implementation of human rights protection.

  This way, National Institutions can combine their efforts with civil society to stimulate a nation-wide dialogue.

  Both NGOs and National Institutions can join their voices by attending their country's UPR session.

  It provides the opportunity to address their comments before the final outcome at the plenary of the Human Rights Council.

- National Institutions and NGOs can actively participate in disseminating the outcome of the UPR to the public.

  Technology, media and other communication strategies, including the translation into local languages, will ensure the message is heard.

- At the implementation phase, National Institutions can also play a central role.

  Their consultation with NGOs will provide feedback on the progress made by their State government in implementing the UPR recommendations.

2. Thematic collaboration

National Human Rights Institutions and civil society played key roles in the development and adoption of the UN General Assembly on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Here, again, is an excellent example of the collective potential to make a difference in the advancement of human rights around the world.

For example, the ICC is exploring the role of national human rights institutions in development and poverty reduction

strategies.

We are engaging a dialogue to promote responsible corporate behaviour around human rights and to hold business accountable for human rights abuses.

These thematic issues are glowing examples of collaboration.

3. Supporting the establishment and strengthening of NIs

NGOs have played a vital role for many years in supporting the establishment and strengthening of many National Institutions.

They have also played a key role in assisting human rights institutions when their independent status was threatened.

As I recall, this was the case for the National Human Rights Commissions of Korea and Denmark and both had positive outcomes.

In Korea, the Parliament of the Republic of Korea agreed to maintain the independence of the National Human Rights Commission of Korea.

The successful result can be attributed to the action taken by the Korean NGO community, the ICC and its members.

NGOs and NHRIs have shared knowledge and expertise in many other ways.

On that note, I welcome the news that Mr. Anselmo Lee, the former Executive Director of FORUM-ASIA, was recently appointed to the National Human Rights Commission of Korea.

I also want to commend the work of the Asian NGOs Network on National Human Rights Institutions (ANNI).

Recognizing the value of a National Human Rights Institution as the principal domestic human rights protection mechanism was a major step forward.

Conclusion

We are eager to foster and sustain meaningful and constructive relationships with NGO communities.

The International CommitteeICC welcomes your ideas and opinions.

Meetings, such as this one, allow us to reflect on areas where we can work together to develop our international priorities.

My hope is that we continue to influence powerful changes in human rights thinking and practice.

I look forward to working with your organizations over the coming years and look forward to your input and questions

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